



## Press Release No. 70/2017

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### For income-based childcare fees

**A survey surprises with its findings on Konstanz residents' ideas about fair childcare fees.**

**Konstanz residents have complex opinions on the topic of childcare fees. Professor Marius R. Busemeyer, who holds a professorship in policy analysis and political theory at the University of Konstanz and who worked with Professor Achim Goerres from the University of Duisburg-Essen on this project, surveyed Konstanz residents on their willingness to pay for childcare. The average amount respondents considered fair was exactly 191 euros. A large majority also supported charging childcare fees based on parental income. Another finding was that neither the religious background of the parents nor the length of time lived in Konstanz played a role in perceptions of fair fees. The survey was part of a broader survey of Konstanz residents conducted by the Konstanz sociologist Professor Thomas Hinz in 2014.**

In 2014, the average fee actually charged for publicly provided childcare in Konstanz was slightly higher than the amount considered fair. Since then, childcare costs have risen significantly. Respondents did not question fundamentally, however, whether they should pay fees for childcare. This contrasts noticeably with the protests against introducing tuition fees at German universities at the start of the 21st century, which ultimately led to them being revoked. By comparison: Tuition fees of 500 euros per semester break down to about 90 euros a month. "It is clear in people's minds that childcare costs something", Marius Busemeyer emphasises.

The study also looked at which factors could influence perceptions of fair childcare costs among respondents. Marius Busemeyer calls it a "very strong finding": Respondents were of the opinion that individuals who are better off financially should pay more for childcare than less well-off individuals. All respondents felt this way, independent of their personal income and including those with higher incomes. People with higher incomes even tended to support paying more for childcare. "The principle of income-based fees is considered fair, even though it is currently not implemented in Konstanz where the fees are basically the same for everyone", Marius Busemeyer says.

Other, non-financial resources play a role in what people consider to be fair childcare fees. If, for example, grandparents live in the area, who can take on childcare responsibilities, respondents considered it fair for such parents to pay slightly higher fees. Conversely, respondents thought single parents should receive a fee reduction. Another finding is that it made no difference in

responses whether mothers worked. This is surprising, considering that this is a relatively new constellation in Germany.

The survey also investigated whether the respondents' religious background played a role in perceptions of fair childcare fees. In fact, it played no role at all. Respondents considered it fair for people of all religious backgrounds, including those differing from the majority of society (i.e. immigrants), to pay the same childcare fees. In the same manner, respondents thought it should make no difference in deciding childcare fees whether someone has lived a long time in Konstanz or just moved to the city. "We do not observe any discriminatory effects", comments Marius Busemeyer.

Such surveys, like this one on perceptions of fair fees, pose an empirical challenge. For this reason, Marius Busemeyer's team chose to perform a vignette study, which uses a series of scenarios to assess opinions. Participants were not asked questions directly which childcare fee they considered fair. Instead they were asked to evaluate a certain situation as fair or unfair. "This method helps us get a more reliable indication of what people actually consider fair", says Marius Busemeyer. Each scenario included different variables, which were not directly apparent to the respondents.

Konstanz is similar to many German cities in that it is also confronted with an increased demand for publicly provided childcare. This explains why people accept paying for childcare while they rebel against having to pay tuition fees for university study. Marius Busemeyer: "Germany has a very long tradition of tuition-free study. Childcare facilities are a relatively new development. When budgets are tight and a new policy needs to be implemented, the resources have to come from somewhere. For this reason, parents were required to pay for the new service right from the start". This is a valuable finding for political decision-makers. "If people consider a fee structure to be fair, then we can assume that they are also willing to contribute to the costs for expanding childcare capacity", says Marius Busemeyer.

#### **Original publication:**

Marius R. Busemeyer, Achim Goerres: Measuring willingness to pay for childcare: Findings from a vignette study in the city of Konstanz. GSDS Working Paper No. 2017-12, May 2017

<https://www.gsds.uni-konstanz.de/research/working-papers/>

#### **Facts:**

- Study on the willingness of Konstanz residents to pay for childcare.
- The survey was performed in 2014 as part of a broader survey of Konstanz residents.
- 1,577 Konstanz residents participated in the study.
- The study was funded by the German Excellence Initiative.

#### **Note to editors:**

You can download a photo here:

[https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserver/2017/0\\_51\\_Busemeyer.jpg](https://cms.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/pi/fileserver/2017/0_51_Busemeyer.jpg)

**Caption:** Prof. Dr Marius Busemeyer

**Photo:** University of Konstanz

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